

An Emersonian in the Sandwich Islands: The Career of Giles Waldo

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In the spring of 1845, two young friends of Ralph Waldo Emerson embarked independently on two very different experiments that were designed to answer some of the problems they faced. One of these experiments, Henry David Thoreau's sojourn of a little over two years at Walden Pond, is well known. The other experiment, Giles Waldo's sojourn of nearly three years in the Hawaiian Islands, deserves to be better known, not only because it provides an interesting contrast to Thoreau's experiment but also because it sheds light on the role of consuls and merchants in the Islands in the busy 1840s.¹

Giles Waldo (1815-1849), the eighth of nine children of a farmer in Scotland, Connecticut, came from an established New England family. Like Emerson, he was a descendant of Cornelius Waldo, who had settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts, in 1654,² and his family home—a sturdy two-story New England farmhouse built about 1715—is owned today by the Scotland Historical Society. Emerson met him in January 1843 in Washington, D. C., while there on a lecture tour and described that meeting in a letter to Caroline Sturgis, who was later to marry Waldo's close friend, William Tappan:

In the Rotunda of the Capitol, in the organic heart, that is, of our fair continent, my companion brought to me a youth of kindest & gentlest manners and of a fine person, who told me he had wished to see me more than any other person in the country, & only yesterday had expressed that wish. Well he took me into his guidance, showed me all the main spectacles of the city and was so well natured & well cultured & so apprehensive & so affectionate that we had the happiest communication for four days. Then he accompanied me to the Baltimore Cars, and we parted quite gaily, he saying, 'I am with you.' At Baltimore,

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I wrote a few lines to him, which was just,—to acknowledge the pleasure of so much kindness, and presently received the warmest note *written at the same hour* from him. Yesterday here in Phila. I had a second letter rejoicing in this coincidence and a proper love letter. Shall I tell him he is a fool; that I am an old cold capricious utilitarian man having already imperfect covenants of faith & love with three or four of the noblest of the children of men, imperfect too through my own hesitations & defects? or shall I dream out this dream also unto the end? Give me your best opinion, my dear counsellor. Did friendship ever keep people awake o'nights?³

The day after the meeting, Emerson wrote to his wife: "Young Waldo is quite an intelligent agreeable person & *takes the Dial*." A week later he commented, "Much the most romantic incident of my journey thus far is my fiery friendship with Giles Waldo of Washington, from whom I receive every day or two, the lovingest letters. I, the old man!"⁴ Waldo's letters to Emerson are those of a pupil asking a master for wisdom and for advice on how to live his life: "Be thou my Prophet and tell me how I may make the outward conform to the inward."⁵

Many of his questions to Emerson are couched in "spiritual" language—Waldo had been reading Swedenborg enthusiastically shortly before meeting Emerson⁶—but what the young man most needed was practical advice. Although apparently not college educated, Waldo had somehow secured a position with James H. Cravens, a one-term Congressman from Indiana. That position would come to an end on March 3rd, when Craven's term would be up, and Waldo had incurred some burdensome debts. He tried teaching school briefly, and then in April he moved to New York City to join his friend William Tappan, who was working in the business of his father, Lewis Tappan.

Shortly after moving to New York, Waldo met Thoreau, then living temporarily on Staten Island, who dutifully looked up Waldo at Emerson's request. Waldo wrote to Emerson that he was highly impressed with "all the fine things that Henry Thoreau has told me today of the signification of words, & letters, and Basque mysticism, which was so new never to have been dreamed of before, by such an illiterate learned person as I am," and then described how he and Thoreau went for a walk and "lost ourselves in the interminable forests of Staten Island." Waldo admitted that his interview with Thoreau "has shown me how desperately ignorant I have been content to remain of books" and "in regard to 'this scholar stuff'

there could be but little sympathy between us,—at least that he had nothing to learn of me, while I must owe everything to him.”⁷

Late in May, Waldo returned to Connecticut to visit his father, who was ill and was to die on July 7th. Just over a week after his father’s death, Waldo made a long-planned visit to Concord, where he stayed several days with Emerson, met Nathaniel Hawthorne (“a truly loveable person”) and Thoreau’s hiking companion Ellery Channing, with whom he felt kinship in a common “brotherhood of souls.”⁸ On the last day of this visit, Emerson wrote to Thoreau, “Giles Waldo has established himself with me by his good sense. I fancy from your notices that he is more than you have seen.”⁹

Back in New York, Waldo found himself dissatisfied with city life. In late August, he and Tappan moved to the woods of Hamilton County and “lived like Indians for a few weeks.” After their return to the city, Waldo wrote that he “had almost determined several times to leave all and follow the Spirit into the wilderness,” for “nothing but conscience—a desire to help myself pay my debts—keeps me here.”¹⁰

A few months later, he and Tappan again succumbed to the lure of the woods. Emerson wrote to his friend Margaret Fuller in December 1843:

I have letters tonight from my friendly Waldo in N.Y. just on the eve of his departure for the Hamilton Forest where he goes as he thinks to ‘severe study’ much apparatus of books having gone before him. He writes most resolutely and ardently as if a great Muse had just now shone on him and he could not utter what he has been revolving—and thinks in that wild boundless country he shall find words to his dreams.¹¹

This second jaunt to the woods, in the middle of winter, turned out to be filled less with dreams than with nightmares. Waldo and Tappan discovered that they could not be self-supporting in the woods and so “were still obliged to buy,” just as they had been in the city. Moreover, Tappan burnt his feet so badly that he had to be carried to a settlement, and Waldo froze his feet in the icy cabin. Although the two had planned to do some writing, as Thoreau was to do in his house in the woods, the cabin was dark and so cold “that writing without mittens would be almost impossible. For this reason we wrote but little.”¹²

Discouraged by this wintry experience and trying to find an answer to the questions “What am I to do?” and “How am I and

my friend to live?" Waldo found himself, at the age of 28, dreaming of the tropics:

If one could live a paradisaical life outwardly, should not a climate which would permit such a life be sought?—Why should we not, if we would live without animals and fire,—and commerce, and degrading trades, betake ourselves to some Pacific islands, or South American Eden? William and I have talked this matter over when we were shivering in our cabin, till we felt quite warmed with the tropical climate into which we transported ourselves. And I think nothing should keep me from going to seek such a climate but the feeling of duty owed by me to the New England in which I was born.¹³

A gap of nearly a year occurs at this point in the correspondence, and it was not until late December 1844 that Waldo was to write again, apologizing for his long silence and referring cryptically to some kind of moral and spiritual crisis. "One of the chief pleasures I have," he wrote sardonically, "is that of being in debt."¹⁴

Three months later, just when Thoreau was beginning to cut the trees for his house in the woods, Waldo found a way to combine his dream of the tropics with a practical way of dealing with his debts: he was on his way to the Sandwich Islands aboard the ship *Toulon* with Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Gurton Abell. Abell, who had been appointed U. S. Consul in Honolulu by President John Tyler in the final months of his administration, offered Waldo the lucrative position of Vice Consul in Lāhainā, the port in the Hawaiian Islands then most visited by whaling ships. In the midst of the long voyage out, Waldo wrote to his younger brother, George, from Valparaiso, Chile, "I suppose I shall receive a good deal of money for my consular services, which is not bad."¹⁵ What neither Waldo nor Abell had any way of knowing, of course, was that during their five-month voyage the new U.S. President, James Polk, had appointed his own candidate to the Consulate, Joel Turrell, who would replace Abell on July 1, 1846.¹⁶

The *Toulon* finally reached Honolulu on August 12th, and within two weeks Waldo—to his astonishment—was offered the post of Chief Justice of the Sandwich Islands, a position that would give him a fine house in Honolulu and an annual salary of \$4000, "the highest salary next to that of the King which is only \$6000."¹⁷ Waldo had no legal training or experience, but there was a desperate need to find persons with even minimal qualifications to fill positions in the Hawaiian judiciary, which was being organized at just this time.

(The first lawyer in Hawai'i, John Ricord, had arrived only the year before.) Waldo was not eager to take the job, but at Abell's urging offered to take the post for the house and a salary of \$2500, provided he did not have to take the oath of allegiance.

The position, of course, did require an oath of allegiance to the Hawaiian monarchy, and so, as Waldo hoped, he was turned down. A few weeks later, on September 19, 1845, Governor Kekuanaoa appointed the American Protestant missionary Lorrin Andrews as Judge of the Court of O'ahu, to act as the Governor's substitute in all cases involving foreigners. This, presumably, was the position that had been offered to Waldo. Andrews later said that he had taken the office with reluctance but that "some one ought to take it" who knew the local languages and customs and had some feeling for the interests of the native population.¹⁸

In a long letter to Emerson, Waldo reported that he had arrived "just at the commencement of the busiest season of the year": he expected about 300 American whaling ships during the next three months. Then he would have three months of leisure until the next group of ships arrived in March. He reported that he had been "somewhat flattered & a good deal amused at the offer made me by his Hawaiian Majesty's Government to give me the office of 'Lord High Chancellor' or 'Lord Chief Justice'—or something of that sort." He was relieved not to have been given the job, but "you must allow that to a man in the least ambitious to have a high sounding title there is some temptation in the 'Lord High Chancellorship.' " The description he gives of life in the Islands suggests that he had found, in many respects, that tropical paradise of which he and Tappan had dreamed while freezing in their cabin:

The climate here is a most beautiful one—at this warmest season I find myself perfectly comfortable out of the sun as I for the most part managed to keep myself. . . . The town [Lahaina] contains about 4000 inhabitants nearly all of whom are natives—the foreigners consist of Americans, English, Dutch, Danish, French & Chinese who are either merchants or mechanics. Here, & at Honolulu especially, the Europeans live in a style of oriental luxury, in large stone houses, defended from the heat of the sun by trees & shrubbery; something as I had supposed the foreign residents of Calcutta & the East Indian towns generally live. They have great numbers of native servants who are well-treated & sufficiently paid for the services they render. . . .

For society there are several merchants, three doctors, & last but not least five missionary families, who are very intelligent & much more charitable than the most of their brethren at home.

Because of the year-around abundance of “bananas, plaintains, grapes & berries of various kinds & almost all the fruits of the tropics,” Waldo’s letter continues:

This is certainly the spot to establish a colony of fruit-eaters & perhaps Mr. Alcott & Thoreau may be disposed to come here. If so, I should be happy to enter into negociation [*sic*] with this government to procure them land. . . . If I were inclined to be indolent & to enjoy mere physical existence I would give up all thoughts of home & retire to the woods with the natives at once, put on my girdle of bark or wear none, & make my meals on bananas and cocoanuts. But I cannot yet dispense with books & the makers of books, & am unfit for the life according to nature. So though I live on fruits I dwell in a house of stone, & am clothed in linen from a far country toiling much for money in the bargain.¹⁹

On September 23, 1845, Waldo was appointed U. S. Consul in Lāhainā. Since it was then normal practice for consular officials in Hawai‘i to conduct business on the side, consulships in Hawai‘i were known as the most lucrative such positions in the Pacific.²⁰ Waldo reported to his brother that he had been offered \$10,000 to remove the consulate from the store owned by his predecessor in the Lāhainā vice-consulship, Milo Calkin, to another store, “which I have refused to do, as it is bad enough to take away his office without also ruining his business. Besides *he* offers me a partnership in his business which will be worth at least 3 or 4000 per an.”²¹ By October, Giles was writing to George:

I think I shall clear \$3000 this year. . . . In three years I hope to arrive at home with \$10,000 or \$12,000 hard money and all my debts paid besides having as much leisure in the course of the year as I could have had at home while getting a bare subsistence. Now tho’ I am no less a radical than when I left, I feel no compunctions of conscience in making this money when I can.²²

In a second letter of the same date, however—sent by another ship in case the first letter should miscarry—Waldo warned his brother:

Do not let the folks at home get the impression that I have found a ‘gold mine’ here, and expect too much. I am doing well now, it is true . . . but something may turn up to spoil the whole. I may be turned out of office—lose my health or something bad may happen which will leave me worse than I was when I came out here. . . . I do not by any means dislike my official duties though they are very arduous, but you

must be aware that living here is to me an exile from all with whom I sympathize fully, though there are some good and intelligent people here. The Doctor of the U. S. Hospital [Charles F. Winslow] and his wife are highly cultivated people. The Doctor is a Unitarian & his wife a sort of half Quaker and Garrisonian. . . . Some of the missionaries are also very good folks more liberal than the clergy of their sect at home, and all on very excellent terms with me. I avoid entirely all association with the merchants and other bourgeois here who are generally without morals & without any principle whatever save that of sensuality & avarice.²³

Waldo's comments in this letter on the missionaries and merchants have a certain irony in view of the fact that within a few months Waldo himself was to become a merchant and then he, too, was to be regarded by the local missionaries as being "generally without morals." Initially Waldo had made a favorable impression on the Reverend Cochran Forbes, seamen's chaplain in Lāhainā, who described Abell and Waldo shortly after their arrival as "very candid, pleasant, intelligent men."²⁴ But by March 1846, shortly after Waldo and two partners opened the trading house of Waldo and Company, Forbes was writing in his Journal:

It is lamentable to see the course pursued here by our Vice Consul. He is rarely seen at the house of God on Sab. and Mr B[enson] his partner a professor of religion in U. States has not been seen at chapel since his union with Mr. W[aldo] now some weeks.²⁵

Despite his friendly personal relationship with some of the missionaries, Waldo clearly shared the anticlerical attitude that prevailed among many of the Transcendentalists, as is clear from his comments on his "missionary friend, [Lorrin] Andrews":

Indeed, for some time past he has not been connected with his mission, having withdrawn on account of the connection of the Board at home with slavery.—His dependence for support is upon the foreign residents & seamen to whom he lectures—his whole income possibly amounting to some three hundred dollars a year. He is a good & learned man & I have some reason to hope a little inclined to heresy,—some good may yet come out of the presbyterian Nazareth.²⁶

One missionary, the Reverend Jonathan S. Green, who was stationed inland on Maui at Makawao, ordered writing paper, cooking utensils, and clothing from Waldo and Company and sent down pails of butter. One of his letters refers to a copy of Carlyle's

Past and Present which he had borrowed from Waldo, read “pretty thoroughly,” and intended to return.²⁷ At the same time, however, Green was receiving disquieting news about Waldo from the missionary Reverend Dwight Baldwin, who was stationed in Lāhainā. Responding to an apparently cryptic reference in a letter from Baldwin—a letter that does not appear to be extant—Green asked:

Do you mean Waldo? And pray tell me what about him? Not a word have I heard of his bad deeds. I pray you tell me at once what it is, and how known. . . . In what a wretched world we live! What next? I am prepared to hear almost any thing of almost any man. O for a lodge in some wilderness!²⁸

Waldo’s “bad deeds”—if the rumors were true—consisted of more than merely non-attendance at church and friendship with the Unitarian Dr. Winslow. He was also giving hospitality to three French Jesuit priests, whom Waldo described as “playing thunder with the protestants, stealing their converts.” They “eat at my house & give me lessons in French, pretty decent fellows who drink their (my) claret & mind their own business.” And Waldo’s contacts with the King, Kamehameha III, might well not have met the missionaries’ approval: “Mr. Benson & myself sleep & study in the King’s house here. He’s living at Oahu at present. The king is a fine fellow & plays a good game of cards.”²⁹ Worst of all, the missionaries believed him to be guilty, if only by association, of involvement in the two major vices connected with the whalers’ visits to Lāhainā: drinking and prostitution. Waldo and Company did possess a liquor license and had liquor on hand, and according to Baldwin the company premises were used for immoral purposes:

A few nights since, after midnight, our police hauled out of the windows of the lodging place of one firm of our merchants eleven (11) young Hawaiian girls who had sold themselves to pollution—slaves to the Devil & their own lusts. One of this firm was our late Dep. Consul [Waldo] who came out with Mr. Abell and another was our present Dep. Consul who came out with Judge Turrill his bro. in law—third was a profesor of religion of respectable connections [Benson?], who came out from New York. O tempora!!³⁰

Yet despite the fact that there were only about a hundred foreigners in Lāhainā—a relatively small group in which it would be difficult to keep any misconduct hidden—it was not easy for Green, back in Makawao, to find out what was really going on in Lāhainā. “Have

you any evidence that Waldo is a licentious character?" he asked Baldwin late in 1846.³¹ A few weeks later he wrote that he had begun to fear that possibly he owed Waldo an apology for believing bad things of him; but by then Baldwin's allegations had been confirmed:

Bro [Timothy] Hunt tells me more than I had before heard and I bless God that I am clear of [Waldo]. What a wretch and Benson seems, if possible worse than Waldo! I trust the Lord will deliver you and the poor people from their hateful continuing influence.³²

A few months later he wrote:

I wish Giles Waldo nothing *better* nor *worse* than to be obliged to read through, read every word, the Lectures of Henry W. Beecher. . . . But he may be utterly lost to all shame.³³

Just how far these charges—which are pretty vague—are justified is difficult to say. The three years that Waldo was in Lāhainā were the three years in which the greatest number of whaling ships visited that port; drinking and prostitution unquestionably flourished to cater to the desires of seamen ashore for recreation. One inhabitant of Lāhainā later recalled that town as "The Brothel of the Pacific":

In the season when the whaling fleet returned from the north to recruit, I have seen schooner after schooner arriving from Hawaii, packed full with women . . . who had come . . . to make money by selling themselves to the sailors. . . . For the white sailorman or mechanics, the only thing to do was to frequent a 'grog shop' or a 'whore shop.'³⁴

But the missionaries could sometimes overgeneralize about the character of merchants, just as Waldo had done before he became one himself. Baldwin refers on one occasion to

the almost universally irreligious & immoral character of foreigners with whom the islands abound. It results from this state of things, that there is not a mechanic in all the islands, with whom any missionary would suffer his son to live in order to learn a trade—there is not a merchant with whom he would allow him to become a clerk.³⁵

Not surprisingly, Waldo had does not refer to any of these matters in his letters home to George; these are concerned initially with his work as Vice Consul and later with his merchandising business, the money he hopes to make from it, and the money George could make if he came out. By early November 1845, less than two months after

Waldo had begun his duties at the consulate, he reported to his brother that the fall whaling season was nearly over—only 30 ships were in port at Lāhainā—and that he was getting along well in his official duties, despite the fact that “both masters & men expect all the aid & assistance in all matters from the Consul or *Counsel* as the sailors term him, as there is nobody else to consult & my brains as well as my muscles are pretty severely taxed & I find all that I know in demand.” Among the many captains and crews “there are rich specimens of human nature & a good many grand rascals to deal with.” Although complaining of being “sometimes a little lonely” and wishing he had “a good wife to keep me company,” Waldo wrote that his time was not lost:

. . . though I am not among my literary friends & do not write so much as I should if I had remained in New York. There are however a good many books here . . . & I have my evenings entirely to myself & a good room to read and study in.³⁶

From the time of his arrival in the Sandwich Islands, Waldo had had repeated opportunities to go into the mercantile business, as his predecessors in office had done. But he was reluctant to do so. By January 1846, however, when he had been in the Islands for about five months, he wrote to Emerson that if he lost his position as Vice Consul he might enter into business:

Many offers have been made me to go into mercantile business, which I could very profitably have done, were it not for the fixed aversion I have to so burying myself. It is not impossible however that in the event of my losing this place I may do something of the kind for a few months.³⁷

Two months later, even before giving up his consulship, he did establish his mercantile house (in partnership with Edward S. Benson from New York and Amiable (“Able”) Langlois, the French Vice Consul in Lāhainā). Waldo reported to his brother that the company was “in a fair way to monopolize all the business of the fleet, which will make a man rich pretty soon.”³⁸ Soon he was reporting enthusiastically that during the busy season the firm entertained at meals about 40 or 50 whaling captains who paid for the privilege and that he had the prospect of making at least \$8000 during the next year:

It would do you good to see the smashing way we do business in my concern. . . . We have three stores here—two retail and one wholesale. In the wholesale we do business with ships, furnishing them with provisions, rigging, & clothing of all sorts & making a good profit. The retail stores are in different parts of the town, & are supported by the notion trade. These are kept by our clerks, as we are altogether occupied with the wholesale business & have to employ many clerks besides. Our wholesale storehouses are five in number & filled with beef, pork, cordage, etc. Every ship does business on an average to the amount of \$800, spring and fall, & we have already had 180 this spring. You may imagine we have our hands full.³⁹

Four months later Waldo reported that even though he had left the consulate, his company had all its fees and perquisites, with a net worth of \$8000, "& this alone will support us. . . . We *ought* to make \$20,000 a year, but perhaps shall not." The future, however, did not look so bright, as the number of whaling ships was diminishing, and those that continued to sail would go to San Francisco, "a better harbor & cheaper port than this."⁴⁰ Waldo added that a number of the foreigners in Hawai'i had already gone there, and that he was thinking of going there in another year and a half.

A year later he reported being "as busy as a bee, & tired to death. . . . We are doing well, but are pushed like thunder for ready money on account of being obliged to keep a huge stock of goods & having small capital."⁴¹ Despite his hard work and large volume of business, shortage of cash continued to be a serious problem. He informed his brother in December 1847:

This past year we have sold nearly \$150,000 worth of goods & have of course made something. But this is more business than we intended doing, and as we give frequently longer credits than we have allowed to us, we are *short* when pay day comes. At present *every dollar* counts. . . . Indeed if I had gone home when I lost the Consulate I should have had enough to pay off all hands at home & had something left & am sorry now I did not do it. As it is, I am 'in for it' & must stay another year to clear up business & get rid of goods. I am not avaricious, & as soon as I can carry a small competency away with me, I will leave the rest here to whom it may concern.⁴²

Two months later, however, Waldo and Company was unable to pay its creditors and was forced to close its doors. In the following month, March 1848, the property was assigned to Horatio N. Crabb, of the U. S. Naval Store in Honolulu, for the benefit of its creditors, and in May Waldo and Company was declared bankrupt. In June

Waldo left for San Francisco on the ship *Honolulu*. "If my life is spared," Waldo had written to his brother on his trip out to Hawai'i, "I shall return to the U. S. in four or five years by the way of China, India, Egypt, and Europe."⁴³ That dream was not to be realized. Just over a year after Waldo arrived in San Francisco, he died, in August 1849, of inflammation of the lungs.⁴⁴

Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond had culminated, seven years after his return to Concord, in a book—an American classic. Waldo's experiment in the Sandwich Islands culminated in bankruptcy and death. What had gone wrong?

As Waldo was neither the first nor the last to discover, the tropical paradise of which he had dreamed while freezing in the woods of New York state did not measure up to his dreams. It was not a place where he could "live without . . . commerce and degrading trades," as he once had hoped. One of his motives in going to the Sandwich Islands was to earn money to pay his debts and to help pay his family's debts on the farm in Connecticut. Entry into merchandising seemed almost inevitable once he assumed the consulship. Reluctant as he was to do it—or so he wrote to Emerson—it was the expected move for a person in his position. After he lost the consulship to his successor, he was dependent upon the business for income. And business brought some inevitable problems. ("The rich man," Thoreau comments in "Civil Disobedience," "is always sold to the institution which makes him rich.") Despite Waldo's hopes that his firm could monopolize the trade, there were two competing firms in Lāhainā, and quite a number of others in Honolulu, where he later opened a branch. Competition was keen. A few months after Waldo had established his company, one of his business competitors, Punchard and Company, wrote to a supplier in Boston:

The fact is this market is and has been for 2 and 1/2 years past completely glutten [*sic*] with goods and many sales have been made during the past years for less prices than the home cost.⁴⁵

Always there was a shortage of cash. Punchard and Company complained to one of its commercial customers, "We are hard up for cash and do not believe that \$1000 could be found in Lāhainā."⁴⁶ And the week after Waldo & Company failed, Punchard reported to a correspondent:

Should we be able to make any remittances this spring we shall gladly do so, but we fear we cannot, for tight times are beginning to be felt all over the Islands, and we cannot collect amounts which we depended on to meet our liabilities to you: amounts long past due.

One of our three shipping concerns in this place failed last week (Waldo & Co.) and we fear others in the Islands will also come to that end. Business here is not done at much profit and ships are rapidly falling off in numbers.⁴⁷

In addition to these economic problems, there may have been some problems among the three partners. Waldo and Langlois seem to have suspected Benson of diverting some of the funds of the partnership. At least this is what Langlois believed, according to one witness in a suit brought by Waldo and Company against two of its creditors.⁴⁸ And Waldo wrote to his brother shortly before the company's failure that he intended soon to dissolve the partnership with Benson.⁴⁹

Finally, there was the problem of health. Waldo obviously ran no danger of frostbite in Hawai'i, as he had in New York, but he often seems to have been incapacitated for business. Langlois, too, had health problems. Waldo wrote to him from Waimea early in February 1848:

I am sorry . . . above all that your health is bad. My health is yet very precarious. The least touch of a southerly wind, or any overexertion brings on my dysentery with all its former force. . . . If . . . your health is too bad to go on with business, I see no other way than to break up at once and pay our creditors as we can. If they will let us go on for another season we shall undoubtedly come out all right. . . . Do not, my dear friend, sacrifice your health to business, but if you deem it necessary on consulting with Mr. Benson, close up at once, using my name, for which this letter will be your authority if you need any.⁵⁰

With this letter, the story of Giles Waldo—so far as we know it from his own words—comes to a close. Emerson, in his most famous essay, "Self-Reliance," published two years before he met Waldo, paid tribute to the enterprise and persistence of the "sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who *teams it, farms it, peddles*, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always like a cat falls on his feet." Waldo was one of the sons of New England who wanted to respond to this challenge. When a young man did practice such self-reliance, Emerson asserted, "we pity him no more but thank

and revere him.”⁵¹ Thus Emerson, ever the optimist, could characterize Waldo and his friend Tappan as “noble youths.”⁵² If Waldo did not turn out quite as Emerson hoped he would, well, none of Emerson’s other “noble youths” did either.

Waldo seems to have tried, however, despite the difficulties he encountered, to be a faithful follower of Emerson’s doctrines. Even in the press of his merchandising business, Waldo wrote from Honolulu to Lāhainā asking his partner Benson to send him his “writing desk, papers, etc. and Swedenborgian books and books of poetry.”⁵³ In the last extant letter Waldo sent to Emerson, he wrote towards the close: “Believe me to be in the love of all that is good and true.”⁵⁴ One likes to think that Emerson chose to remember this sentence from his young friend who had gone off to seek his fortune in the Sandwich Islands but was unable to fulfill his dream of a triumphant return.

NOTES

¹ A brief account of Waldo’s time in Hawaii, together with the transcript of his letter to Emerson of 13 Nov. 1845, is given in Martin K. Doudna, “Thoreau and the Sandwich Islanders,” *New England Quarterly* 56 (Sept. 1983), 432–439. Waldo’s unpublished letters to Emerson, as well as Emerson’s letter to Caroline Sturgis about Waldo, are in the Houghton Library at Harvard University and are quoted by permission of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and of the Houghton Library; Waldo’s letters to his brother George are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and are quoted by permission of the Huntington Library. The letters of Cochran Forbes and Jonathan Green are quoted with the permission of the HMCS Library, and the letters of Dwight Baldwin in the files of the ABCFM at the Houghton Library are quoted by permission of the Houghton Library and of the United Church Board for World Ministries.

² Waldo Lincoln, ed., *Genealogy of the Waldo Family . . . from 1647 to 1900*, 2 vols. (Worcester, Mass.: 1902).

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, letter to Caroline Sturgis, 20 Jan. 1843, Tappan Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard U.

⁴ *The Dial* was the Transcendentalists’ influential literary magazine; *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia U P, 1939), III: 121, 129–29.

⁵ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 20 Jan. 1843, Emerson Papers, Houghton Library.

⁶ Giles Waldo, letter to W. A. Tappan, 21 Dec. 1842, Tappan Papers, Houghton Library.

⁷ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 14 May 1843, Emerson Papers.

⁸ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 19 Aug. 1843, Emerson Papers.

⁹ *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, eds: Walter Harding and Carl Bode (1958; rpt. Westport, Conn.: 1974) 126.

¹⁰ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 26 Sept. 1843, Emerson Papers.

¹¹ Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), feminist, author, and editor of *The Dial*; Rusk III: 231.

- ¹² Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 25 Feb. 1844, Emerson Papers.
- ¹³ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 25 Feb. 1844, Emerson Papers.
- ¹⁴ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 27 Dec. 1844, Emerson Papers.
- ¹⁵ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 29 May 1845, Huntington Library, HM 17458.
- ¹⁶ Rhoda E. A. Hackler, "Our Men in the Pacific: A Chronicle of the United States Consular Officers at Seven Ports in the Pacific Islands and Australasia During the 19th Century," diss. U of Hawai'i 1978, 298.
- ¹⁷ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 26 Aug. 1845, Huntington Library, HM 17460.
- ¹⁸ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 8 Sept. 1845, Emerson Papers; W. F. Frear, *The Evolution of the Hawaiian Judiciary*, HHS Papers 7 (Honolulu, 1894): 8-15; Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1 1778-1854: *Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1938) 241-45; Lorrin Andrews, letter to Reverend S. S. Jocelyn, 5 Dec. 1846, as reprinted in *The American Missionary*, I, No. 11 (Sept. 1847): 87-88.
- ¹⁹ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 8 Sept. 1845, Emerson Papers.
- ²⁰ Hackler 287.
- ²¹ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 26 Aug. 1845, Huntington Library, HM 17460. Calkin had been appointed to that position—his official title was "U. S. Vice Commercial Agent for Lahaina"—on 4 Feb. 1844. See Dorothy Pyle, "The Intriguing Seaman's Hospital," *HJH*, 8 (1974): 122.
- ²² Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 15 Oct. 1845 (the first letter of this date), Huntington Library, HM 17461.
- ²³ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 15 Oct. 1845 (the second letter of this date), Huntington Library, HM 17462. For an account of Dr. Winslow's somewhat checkered career as physician in Lāhainā, see Pyle 121-135. "Garrisonian" refers to William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist.
- ²⁴ Cochran Forbes, letter to Edwin O. Hall, 25 Aug. 1845, HMCS Library.
- ²⁵ *The Journals of Cochran Forbes* (Honolulu: HMCS, 1984) 177
- ²⁶ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 8 Sept. 1845, Emerson Papers. Andrews had been, principal and teacher at Lahainaluna Seminary until his resignation in 1842 over the slavery issue. Within a few days after the date of this letter he accepted the judicial position that apparently had been first offered to Waldo.
- ²⁷ Jonathan S. Green, letter to Giles Waldo, 22 April 1846, HA.
- ²⁸ Jonathan S. Green, letter to Dwight Baldwin, 25 Mar. 1846, HMCS Library.
- ²⁹ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 27 April 1846, Huntington Library, HM 17466.
- ³⁰ Dwight Baldwin, letter to Rufus Anderson, 15 Dec. 1846, ABCFM Files mf. reel 802, Houghton Library. When the incident was related, the day after this letter was written, to a visiting Congregational clergyman from Connecticut, the number of girls involved had jumped to 20. See Chester Smith Lyman, *Around the Horn to the Sandwich Islands and California 1845-50*, ed. Frederick J. Teggart (New Haven: Yale U P, 1924) 151.
- ³¹ Jonathan S. Green, letter to Dwight Baldwin, 24 Nov. 1846, HMCS Library.
- ³² Jonathan S. Green, letter to Dwight Baldwin, 7 Jan. 1847, HMCS Library. Reverend Hunt had told the visiting Congregational clergyman, Chester Lyman, that the weekend camp at Honolua, a few miles north of Lāhainā, which Waldo and Benson ostensibly used for hunting, was actually used for "dissipation and licentiousness." Lyman, *Around the Horn* 154-55.
- ³³ Jonathan S. Green, letter to Dwight Baldwin, 24 Jun. 1847, HMCS Library.
- ³⁴ *Reminiscences of John Cook, Kamaaina and Forty-Niner* (Honolulu: New Freedom Press, 1927) 6, 21.

- ³⁵ Dwight Baldwin, letter to Rufus Anderson, 22 June 1848, ABCFM files, mf. reel 805 Houghton Library.
- ³⁶ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 2 Nov. 1845, Huntington Library, HM 17463.
- ³⁷ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 24 Jan. 1846, Emerson Papers.
- ³⁸ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 7 April 1846, HM 17465.
- ³⁹ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 27 April 1846, HM 17466.
- ⁴⁰ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 14 Aug. 1846, HM 17467.
- ⁴¹ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 30 Aug. 1847, HM 17471.
- ⁴² Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 20 Dec. 1847, HM 17474.
- ⁴³ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 29 May 1845, HM 17458.
- ⁴⁴ *F* 1 Oct. 1849: 55.
- ⁴⁵ Punchard & Co. Letterbook, 24 Sept. 1846, HA.
- ⁴⁶ Punchard & Co. Letterbook, 19 Jan. 1847.
- ⁴⁷ Punchard & Co. Letterbook, 28 Feb. 1848.
- ⁴⁸ Giles Waldo et al. v. Theodore Shillaber and William Paty, First Circuit Court of Hawai'i Folder 1116 HA.
- ⁴⁹ Giles Waldo, letter to George Waldo, 20 Dec. 1847, Huntington Library, HM 17474.
- ⁵⁰ Giles Waldo, letter to Amiable Langlois, 3 Feb. 1848, as transcribed by Henry Rhodes, Clerk of the Hawai'i Supreme Court, Giles Waldo et al. v. Theodore Shillaber and William Paty.
- ⁵¹ *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957) 161-162.
- ⁵² Rusk III: 143; Harmon Smith, "Henry Thoreau and Emerson's 'Noble Youths,'" *Concord Saunterer*, 17 (Dec. 1984): 4-12.
- ⁵³ Giles Waldo, letter to E. S. Benson, 5 Sept. 1847, HA
- ⁵⁴ Giles Waldo, letter to Emerson, 17 Feb. 1846, Emerson Papers.